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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA, INR, INL/AF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2019

TAGS: SNAR ASEC PGOV PREL TO

SUBJECT: TOGO: PRESIDENT FAURE COMMITTED TO FIGHT AGAINST
DRUG TRAFFICKING

REF: A. LOME 718

1B. LOME 657

1C. 08 STATE 111195

Classified By: POLOFF SUSAN F. WALKE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary. President Faure requested a meeting with Ambassador Hawkins to discuss the growing drug trade in Togo, specifically a drug trade organization (DTO) recently apprehended in Lome. He candidly and knowledgeably discussed particulars of that case, the need for increased cooperation between Togo and the United States, and roadblocks to addressing the problems. The Ambassador emphasized the need to take a strong stand on drug issues and briefed the president on U.S. commitment to continue its assistance to Togo. While President Faure seemed willing to move forward on everything discussed, only time will tell if he is truly able to take action.

12. (C) The president started the conversation by telling the Ambassador he had originally requested the meeting because of the lack of action concerning the removal of Jorge Solano-Cortez from Togolese custody (ref A, B). He expressed that he was pleased when he found out Solano-Cortez is to be expelled tomorrow. Ambassador Hawkins explained that slow action on the part of the Togolese prosecutor (who was preparing his own case) contributed to the delay. President Faure inquired about the USG also taking custody of Willem Zabieh, the ringleader of the group. Ambassador Hawkins explained that the United States does not currently have an arrest warrant for him, but the possibility is being pursued.

13. (C) Ambassador Hawkins underscored the importance of making a public stand against the drug trade, referring specifically to the fact that Togolese Parliamentary Deputy Minsoabe Barnabo, who is believed to be the principal Togolese facilitator for the DTO, has yet to be arrested due to his parliamentary immunity. (Note. It was later determined that Barnabo is not even in Togo, but in France for medical reasons. End Note). She noted that people will think President Faure does not have the will to fight drug trafficking if he lets Barnabo go free. Faure assured her that the will is there and vaguely described the next steps to charge the parliamentarian. The Ambassador inquired about a specific provision in the Penal Code of Togo which states there is no immunity for parliamentarians who commit grave crimes such as murder or traffic drugs; President Faure promised to look into it.

14. (C) President Faure expressed an interest in continued cooperation between the GOT and the USG. He noted that the Togolese justice system is not capable of handling cases of this magnitude. In-fighting among the various security sectors -- gendarmerie, police, and the intelligence service -- make it difficult to get reliable information. Faure stated the need for more initial training on not just internal security issues, but also specific drug interdiction training. He was happy to learn that an assessment team is scheduled to come to Togo to evaluate counternarcotics issues across the entire criminal justice system. The president later expressed his intent to have the ANR (Agence National de Renseignement; the national intelligence agency) share the names of suspected traffickers with US authorities and asked

to have them run through criminal databases.

¶15. (C) The president showed the depth of his understanding of the problem when he discussed possible avenues forward. He noted that there is no political will in Togo or West Africa generally to fight trafficking. When asked about the participation of his family in the trade, he said he had talked to a brother about it (he was not specific as to which brother) and did not intend to support illegal activities no matter who was involved. President Faure also noted that drug money could influence the electoral process in Togo, which could further destabilize the already weak country. He said that African countries do not cooperate with each other on drug issues as they do with the United States. Ambassador Hawkins noted that since stopping the drug trade altogether is nearly impossible, the best strategy is to make it more difficult for traffickers to operate.

¶16. (C) Comment. President Faure spent about 45 minutes with just the Ambassador and PolOff; he had no advisors present in the meeting. He was forthcoming with information and made astute comments on possible consequences of the expansion of the drug trade in Togo. Ambassador Hawkins was frank with the president about the need that he be seen as a reliable partner in the fight against crime and corruption. However, although Faure has expressed on numerous occasions that he wishes to crack down on the drug trade, the embassy has yet to see any concrete actions (such as charging Deputy Barnabo) that back up his words. End Comment.

HAWKINS